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AUTHOR Guasti, Lucio
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ABSTRACT

After seeing a keen interest stimulated by a residential course of political training, the executive of the Youth Movement (Democrazia Cristiana) in the province of Reggio Emilia (Italy) decided to abandon the traditional training methodology, which consisted of one or two residential courses evey year on current political issues on the party's history or ideology. The new political training program chosen by the executive was to be scheduled regularly as a part of the annual program; in this way there would be time to check the work done during the year. This new program aimed at making people independent by discussing unusual topics such as politics as a science, and the history of political doctrines. The four phases of the program consisted of 12 weekly meetings at the provincial level, a 3-day conference, 12 bi-weekly meetings, and a final 3-day conference. Each level had a required reading component and involved increasingly complex issues. Most of the people who took part in the initial course are now in the training field. This political education program was prepared for young Catholics between the ages of 18 and 25. The paper breaks down the program in terms of purposes, cycling, staffing, contents, and other factors. (PPB)

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A DESCRIPTION OF POLITICAL TRAINING CARRIED OUT IN THE YOUTH MOVEMENT OF THE "DEMOCRAZIA CRISTIANA" BETWEEN 1977 AND 1978

Lucio GUASTI

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Lucio GUASTI

Bologna- September 1989

A DESCRIPTION OF POLITICAL TRAINING CARRIED OUT IN THE YOUTH MOVEMENT OF THE "DEMOCRAZIA CRISTIANA" BETWEEN 1977 AND 1978

1. The origin of the programme

After seeing a keen interest stimulated by a residential course of political training, the executive of the Youth Movement in the province of Reggio Emilia decided to abandon the traditional training methodology which consisted of one or two residential courses every year, concerning current political issues or the party's history or ideology. This methodology was thought to leave the participants with only a "smattering" idea of current political problems and an uneasiness to participate in the programme. They were not learning to interpret political situations and thus were left dependent on the leader's direction.

The political training programme chosen by the executive was to be regularly scheduled as a part of the annual programme; in this way the residential course would provide time to check the work done during the year. This new programme aimed at making people independent by discussing unusual topics in the training courses of a political party (politics as a science, concept of democracy, history of

political doctrines).

The experience, divided into four phases, is described below.

2. The four phases of the experience

PHASE 1

PERIOD: February-May 1977 - 12 weekly meetings of 1.30-2 hours each in the provincial headquarters of the DC.

CONTENTS: Introduction to the idea of politics as a science:

- what politics is
- study of power
- comparison of political systems
- political judgement
- politicians

Reference: R. Dahl, Introduzione alla scienza politica, it. trans. Bologna 1967

METHODS: 15 to 25 participants, almost all members of the DC Youth Movement. The discussion, led by professor Lucio Guasti from the University of Parma, was about the 20 pages (or a chapter) the participants were supposed to read.

At the end of phase 1, one of the participants was asked to summarize G. Sartori's book Democrazia e definizioni.

PURPOSES: - To establish the objectives of the new training method described in paragraph 1;

- to prepare a youth executive with good political abilities.

RESULTS: For many of the participants this experience was the fulfilment of a personal need for an increased involvement in the Movement. The DC Youth Movement in Reggio Emilia played a supplementary role with regard to other organizations in the catholic world.

EVALUATION: - Good attention level in the group;

- the new method had a shocking effect on many participants (some showed an increased interest, others left).

PHASE 2

PERIOD: October 1977 - 3 day residential course

CONTENTS: - Concept of democracy;

- idea of training;

Reference: G. Sartori, Democrazia e definizioni, Bologna, 1976.

METHODS: - 10 participants (over 25 invited) = the most motivated;

- report of the summary of the book (by Sartori) by the participant who had read it (a copy of the summary had been handed to each participant);
- a free discussion led by professor Guasti followed;
- the book was divided and reconstructed by transverse concepts.

PURPOSES: - To check the work done during the year and to plan the programme for the following year;

- to learn how to work on a text picking out its basic ideas;
- to understand the importance of democracy (in its historical significance, its limits, its paradoxes) in the political training process.

RESULTS: - The objectives were , at least partially, achieved;

- moreover, in order to be able to generalize the use of this new training methodology, a second level training (for leaders) was needed.

EVALUATION: Strong learning and community life experience: the group was created.

PHASE 3

PERIOD: November 1977-April 1978 - a meeting every second week - 12 meetings of 1.30/2 hours each in the provincial headquarters of the DC.

CONTENTS: - History of political doctrines;

- some ideas from contemporary authors;

References: - J. J. Chevallier, Le grandi opere del pensiero politico,it. trans. Bologna, 1968;

- J. Maritain, Cristianesimo e democrazia, it. trans. Milano , 1977;

- N. Bobbio, Quale socialismo?, Torino, 1976.

METHODS: - 25 to 40 participants, 20 of them were not members of the DC; 15 people had taken part in the first phase;

- in turn the participants read and summarized a chapter from J. J. Chevallier (or a new text) and they handed their summary to the other participants;

- during the meeting the summary was reported and

discussed;

- Prof. Guasti was not always present and he did not lead the discussion.

PURPOSES: - To carry on with the training work after establishing the objectives in stage 1;

- to make the participants responsible getting them to lead the meetings themselves;

- to create a list of required readings to be shared by the participants in order to reduce the reading time spent by each person.

RESULTS: - The purposes were mostly achieved;

- however the experience was half way point between the training group of a party and a discussion group: most of the participants were not DC activist.

EVALUATION: - Lower attention level than in stage 1 maybe due to Prof. Guasti's absence and therefore to the participants' management;

- J. J. Chevallier's book proved to have some limits with regard to the historical aspects:

a) the historical treatise stops at Hitler's times and current issues (namely Habermas, Luhmann, Rawes) were not studied;

b) it would have been better to study history by problems (eg contractualism from Hobbes up to the present);

c) starting from Machiavelli, the text leaves out the beginning of political development and its roots.

PHASE 4

PERIOD: November 1978 - 3 day residential course

CONTENTS: - The concept of democracy

main reference: G. Sartori , Democrazia e definizioni

- J. Maritain, L'uomo e lo stato,

Cristianesimo e democrazia

- N. Bobbio, Quale socialismo?

- H. Kelsen, I fondamenti della democrazia

- Politics as a science

References: - R. Dahl, Introduzione alla scienza

politica

- W. J. Mackenzie, La scienza della politica

M. Duverger, Introduzione alla politica.

- History of political doctrines

as well as J. J. Chevallier, ideas from Marx, Tocqueville, Rousseau;

- Political education

minutes from a meeting organized by the Salesian Order.

METHODS: - 4 people were asked to make reports for the November course during the summer;

- 8 participants (only the people who had taken part in phase 2 were invited along with some others);

- the four reports (about the topics which were the basic ideas outlined before) were read and discussed together (the discussion was led by Prof. Guasti);

- some of the topics, especially the historical issues of some authors, were simplified and reconstructed using the method of summarizing by

concepts.

PURPOSES: - To improve the "educators group" by the assignement of written reports where the problem was not just summarizing a text, but comparing it to other texts;

- to learn several methodologies to work on a text:

a) traditional summarizing

b) summarizing by concepts

c) reconstruction by concepts

- to plan the continuation of this second level training.

RESULTS: - There was an awareness of the need to spread the results of this experience (as to the contents and the methodology of work) by making a proposal to the party;

- a proposal was made to publish the work done in those two years (which would happen in 1979).

EVALUATION: An effect that can be evaluated today is that most of the people who took part in these two experiences are now working in the training field.

3. FROM THE TRAINING EXPERIENCE TO THE REALIZATION OF A TEXT

3.1 The preliminary copy of 1979

The proposal to summarize a large part of the work carried out during the four stages of the training experience into a preliminary report took place in 1979. This text, called Aspects of political training, was edited by the DC Youth Movement of Reggio Emilia and is divided into four parts ("Historical Aspects"; "The Concept of Democracy"; "Politics as a Science"; "Synthesis of some Contemporary Authors' Works"). There was a dual purpose: a) to provide the party Youth Groups with guide-lines for political training (the working methodology and the choice of the topics were more important than the quality of the contents); b) to encourage a discussion on the method of implementing the political training within the DC.

The text was circulated all over Italy by distribution channels within the party and it achieved an unexpected success: all 4000 printed copies were immediately sold and, what was very significant, it was in great demand by non-DC youth groups and by high school teachers (who intended to use it for their civic education programme).

3.2 The text of 1985

In 1985 the preliminary copy of 1979 was transformed into a book published by ELLEDICI called Youth, Democracy, Political Science, Aspects of Political Training.

There were three main reasons to this new edition:

a) the preliminary copy was out of print and there was a high demand for a reprint;

b) at the time there was a disinterest about political training among the leaders of the party, but there were signs of a renewed interest in political education in society. This interest was to lead to the birth in Italy of over 200 schools of political education (all of them with a catholic influence) between 1987 and 1989; it was thought that a text not clearly labelled DC could give new life to the discussion;

c) since the text did not have an ideological slant, it could well suit the training needs of youth groups not necessarily connected to the DC, as well as the requirements of high school teachers (it was here that the 1979 copy had found unexpected approval).

Compared to the "first edition", the second one showed some additions: a few essays (on the concept of democracy and on

politics as a science), summaries of some more texts and an introduction describing the three main ideas which have guided the entire training experience, namely:

a) democracy is a mentality, and a historical process rather than a set of rules, mechanisms and institutional guarantees;

b) the scientific mentality (a habit of reasoning following the method of « theory - hypothesis - verification - possible correction and/or falsification ») is an essential element of the democratic mentality;

c) the identification of the politician's specific area of competence and its distinction on the one hand from the "technician"'s competence (it is not necessary to be a professor of Economics to be the Secretary of Industry) and on the other hand from the ethical sphere (to be an honest man is not enough to be a good politician).

3.3 The structure of the text

a) The first part of the book (Historical Aspects) which uses J. J. Chevallier's Le grandi opere del pensiero politico as a guide, covers the history of political thought from Machiavelli to the Second World War concentrating on the works of those thinkers whose contribution has been decisive in the

implementation of the current political structures. The choice of Machiavelli as a starting point is not fortuitous, since Machiavelli's Principe introduces a new concept of politics; it is the first attempt to organize, with all its contradictions, a theory of the modern state. It is obvious that the debate about the development of political thought cannot end with the authors included in this first section (this is shown by the problems that arise, although these are just briefly referred to, in the summaries of some contemporary authors' works included in the fourth section).

The method of summarizing by concepts is used in the two appendices to the first part:

- the first one briefly describes the conceptual structure of three works: Rousseau's Il contratto sociale, Tocqueville's La democrazia in America, Marx's Manifesto;
- the second one (a comparison between the "natural law" idea and the Hegel-Marxist one) uses the method of analyzing conceptual structures to compare political theories which are distant in time and different in their ideological outcomes; in this way, cutting the history of political doctrines horizontally, according to their structural homogeneity, parallels, somewhat surprisingly, become possible.

b) The second part (The Concept of Democracy) includes a large synthesis of G. Sartori's Democrazia e definizioni, in order to analyze the "key-concept" of political training.
In the appendix to this second part (an examination of the ideas of democracy, people and power) Sartori's book has been divided and reconstructed by concepts; this work provided the framèwork for a brief examination of the concepts of democracy, people and power, which uses, by the comparative method, some contributions from other authors, namely Weber, Maritain, Kelsen, Bobbio.

c) The third section (Politics as a science) is an attempt to discuss an important but "unusual" subject in political training programmes, through the synthesis of some remarkable works in the history of political science (including authors such as G. Mosca, M. Duverger, M. Curtis, R. Dahl, W. Mackenzie).
Since the third part of the book is a first approch to this area of research, the study of the general methodological problems of political science has been given more important than the analysis of its contibutions to some specific problems of the state or of the society.
An extensive introduction (Historical aspects and problems

about political science) provides an outline of the main points of the discussion about political science and partially fills the gap due to the absence of references to works after 1975; however the most recent debate involves such extensive and complex problems that even a basic survey would have required an actual anthology of political writings.

d) The fourth and last section (Synthesis of some contemporary authors' works) aims at providing information about some problems of the contemporary political debate through a synthesis of books by J. Maritain, E. Mounier, H. Kelsen, R. Garaudy and N. Bobbio; it is obvious that the development of political thought cannot be concluded with these authors. An idea of the debate carried on in these years in Italy is given in the synthesis of two more recent works: A. Ardigò's Crisi di governabilità e mondi vitali and P. Scoppola's La nuova cristianità perduta. These books are also noteworthy for the type of dialectic implied between Christian thought and political theory.

Because of its structure, the text can be used in sections which can be integrated and adapted according to the users' requirements and the purposes that the training course aims at achieving.

3.4 The distribution of the text

The book had a very large circulation (as did the first copy); it was used as an experimental text-book in some high schools and in some university courses. In Italy it is still the only political education text to indicate an actual training programme.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A POLITICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME

1. The origin of the experience

The political education course in Reggio Emilia is one of the over 200 similar training programmes of catholic influence organized in Italy between 1987 and 1989.

The first stage of this course took place in Reggio Emilia between January and April 1989; it was the result of a long debate between the promoters of political education within the DC Youth Movement in 1977 and 1978 (an activity which had led to the publication of the book Youth, democracy, political science) and the provincial executive of the ACLI (Christian Italian Workers Association). This social organization has primarily an educational role and has considerable experience in the methodology of group activity.

The political education programme in Reggio Emilia has partially put into practice the training curriculum described in the text published by the DC Youth Movement as well as the union between the ideas suggested in that text and the working methodology characteristic of ACLI.

These two main promoters had the assistance of the CISL (Italian Confederation of Labour Unions), which is the Union of

the catholic laity, and of the Urban Vicariate -the institutional organization of the town parishes- which gave its approval and the imprimatur of the local ecclesiastical hierarchy. It should be noted that in Italy there are not many courses of political education promoted by secular organizations; the diocese usually undertakes this task organizing lectures about ethics, the social doctrine of the Church, the history of the catholic movement. The experience conducted in Reggio Emilia is therefore unique since it was promoted by secular organizations which had an explicit delegation from the hierarchy.

2. Purposes

The training course was prepared for young catholics between 18 and 25, who were involved in social activities, especially voluntary services. The aim was to develop an understanding of the following principles:

a) that politics is an essential aspect of the human experience (from small groups to institutions) that cannot be set aside;

b) that this dimension involves a specific competence which consists of the ability to control several interdependent elements (this requires an attention to the needs of everyone

and the ability to establish priorities);

c) the political importance of the social commitment and of the assistance activity: one often takes care of elderly or handicapped people without really knowing the actual conditions in which they live; politics means a commitment to learning about the situations, to revealing possible wrongs and to making plans aimed at modifying these unjust situations;

d) the meaning and value of institutions: these are not superstructures which oppress the vitality of movements, on the contrary they are indispensable for making the values and projects expressed by the movements endure.

This choice came from the promoters' belief that there was an antagonistic attitude towards institutions (whether they were local or national) among the catholic youth in Reggio Emilia (where there are many people committed in several voluntary activities).

Therefore, people with high ethical motivations, but with an anti-institutional mentality were confronted with the complexity of social life; this was done to help them to understand:

a) the political importance of their social commitment and

voluntary activity;

b) that their activity is complementary to that of the institutions and parties;

(and not to force them to become executives of a political party or City Councillors).

3. The contents

The subjects discussed can be divided into three sections:

a) the first one treats some basic ideas of political science (politics, power, authority, democracy, participation);

b) the second one concerns the main problem of that course, that is the connection between the crisis of the welfare state, the old and new poverties and the role of voluntary service;

c) the third one is meant to:

- apply the theoretical knowledge acquired in the previous lessons to some practical political situations (the territory and its needs, the structure of the public administration, the socio-economical pattern in Emilia Romagna);
- recall the historical events from the post-war period to the present with emphasis on the activity of the Catholic Church. This discussion was meant to be enriched by references to the local problems (in Reggio Emilia and in Emilia Romagna).

4. Structure of the course and training methodology

The course consisted of three kinds of meetings (and therefore three different learning methods):

a) lectures (a total of 16) to learn and to study the subjects which were the framework of the programme;

b) meetings based on group activity only (a total of 7) during which the participants were asked to work out in detail the topics of the lessons through practical drills, case analyses, simulations and tests;

c) seminars (a total of 6) aimed at specific theoretical analyses complementary to the lectures which were carried out through meetings with politicians and researchers.

4.1 The group activity

The group activity had a very particular role in the course (this is why the composition of the groups remained unchanged during the entire course) and it had different features according to the different kinds of meetings:

a) in the lectures (one hour of report, one hour of group activity and 30 minutes of discussion) the aim was to understand thoroughly the content of the report and to formulate possible questions for the following discussion;

b) in the meetings based on group activity only (usually two hours of group activity and 30 minutes of discussion) the aim was a practical approach to politics, and also an analysis of the changing political mechanisms within the group itself;

c) in the seminars open to the public, as an opportunity for dialogue between the participants and the local citizens, the group activity, when it existed, depended on the nature of the audience and the willingness to participate. In these meetings, the method of "decompression" was generally used: during the 15 minute break after the report, the participants (in groups of three or four) were asked to formulate one or more questions.

4.2 Enrolment in the course

The participants (young people between 18 and 25 involved in social activities and especially voluntary service as said in paragraph 2) could join the course in two different ways:

a) as active participants (maximum 50) they were allowed to take part in any meetings; they had to attend the lectures and the group activity meetings but they could choose

whether to take part in the seminars;

b) as observers (maximum 40) they were allowed to participate in the seminars and the first part of the lectures (report). They were not allowed to take part in the group activity meetings.

(The enrolment fees were different: 50000 £ for the participants and 20000 £ for the observers).

4.3 Times

The course was organized into 29 meetings (6 of which were optional) for a total of 90 hours. The lectures and the group activity encounters took place on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 19.00 to 22.15. There was no fixed day for the seminars.

The meetings were held in the conference room of the provincial headquarters of ACLI (in Reggio Emilia).

4.4 Working methods

A week before the lecture or the seminar the participants were given a text, selected by the speaker, concerning the main subject of the meeting. Almost all the speakers would hand in an outline of their reports. (Some speakers used the over head projector).

4.5 The staff

The staff consisted of 6 people: 3 leaders, 2 coordinators and 1 supervisor.

- The leaders directed the group activities (each of them was in charge of a group from the beginning to the end of the course) helping the communication within the group rather than giving an interpretation of the ideas expressed in the reports.
- The coordinators were responsible for the entire programme. Therefore, they had an important role outside the course (contacts with the lecturers, with the Press, with the political committee supervising the programme; the management of economical and organizational aspects). They also had an important role within the course (they had to lead the general assemblies and the staff meetings, procure the necessary books, edit the lecture notes, record the meetings, and be available to meet the participants - alone or in groups - in order to solve organizational problems, doubts about the contents or didactic and methodological aspects).
- The supervisor (a national executive of the ACLI) would meet with the staff every 20 days to check the progress of the course and to organize the group activity meetings.

The coordinators worked full-time and the leaders part-time.

The usual staff meetings (all the staff were there, except for the supervisor) took place three times a week (before both of the weekly lectures and at the end of the week). These meetings, which lasted about three hours, concerned the way in which the group had worked and the leader's feelings in playing his role.

5. Evaluation of the experience

There was a large attendance (85%) for this kind of course, considering the number of hours (two or even three meetings in a week). On the one hand this number of hours caused a sort of knowledge "indigestion" and therefore some learning difficulties; on the other hand it generated a " full-immersion" atmosphere which created a remarkable empathy among the members of each group. The result was a group strongly motivated to take part in similar programmes in the future.
In the final evaluation of this experience (carried out in the group as well as in the interviews of each participant conducted by the coordinators) some critical observations about the heavy work load and the excessive insistance on the subject of voluntary work were made. The participants were

mainly interested in understanding how the political mechanisms work, in knowing the political language and the history of the political parties.

6. The second stage of the course

In the second stage (which will begin next October) the structure of the course will be much more complex.

6.1 The first cycle

There will be a first cycle of 10 meetings (every week, from October to December 1989) for the new participants about the subjects studied in the first stage of the programme (basic aspects of political science - see paragraph 3.a). Since these are the most original subjects of the entire course, this new cycle is to be based especially on them, in order to allow the new participants to reach the same level of knowledge of the people who had taken part in the first stage (January-April 1989).

6.2 The second cycle

The second cycle (January-March 1990) is meant for both the participants in the first cycle and the first stage.

The cycle is divided into three sections:

a) The territory and its problems.

After an interdisciplinary analysis of the idea of territory, a problem of the local situation will be dealt with by a political action following the method of analysis-intervention;

b) Management of the economy and labour market.

Subjects: - Basic aspects of political economy; - Politics, economy and finance; - New free trade and interventionism of the government in economical matters; - Balance and negotiation between entrepreneurs, government and labour unions; - Development, interdependence and international cooperation; - The EEC in 1992; - Economy and information;

c) Institutions and political parties.

Subjects: - The institutions' role within the society; - Institutions as complex organizations; - The Italian Constitution (historical background, system of values, comparison with other european and non-european examples); - The self-government of local organizations; - Proposals for a reform of the institutions; - Historical origin of political parties; - Development of the main political parties in Europe and in Italy; - Crisis of the political parties (the new relationship between

the political parties and the Constitution, movements, perspectives).

The participants are asked to choose and therefore to specialize in one of these three sections. The course is thus divided into a "common three month period" and a "specializing three month period".

Each section consists of 12 weekly meetings. There will also be some common group activity encouters in which the participants from the different sections will discuss their experience.

6.3 The staff

In the first cycle an observer is assigned to collaborate with the leader (in each group) in order to help him and to improve the understanding of the non-verbal communication.

In the second cycle the coordinator of each section will meet a group of 3 or 4 people once a week to plan how to carry on the programme.

Some participants who had taken part in the first phase of the course could play these two roles (observers in the first cycle and groups of discussion in the second one). This is why

it is important to provide a training course for educators in a first level training programme.

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